VERGHESE KURIEN

When Verghese Kurien stepped down from the train and on to the dusty platform in Anand, Gujarat, on May 13, 1949, little did he know that his life was going to change unimaginably. Waiting for him was not just his own destiny but that of thousands of small, marginalised farmers who, until then, had only known exploitation and deprivation.

The story of Dr Kurien is the story of Amul. It is the story of Operation Flood, the 'billion-litre idea' that set India on the top of the world map for milk production. A die-hard patriot, Kurien was committed to the cooperative cause. He put the milk industry in the hands of the farmers, believing firmly that with ownership would come responsibility and great success. And he was right.

Amar Chitra Katha traces the story of the man who is known as the 'Father of the White Revolution'.

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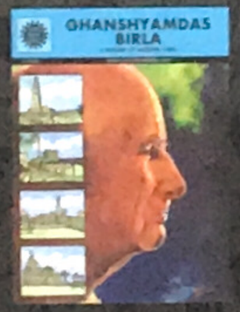

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VISIONARIES

AMAR CHITRA KATHA

VERGHESE KURIEN

THE MAN WITH THE 'BILLION-LITRE' IDEA

Vol. 845 | ₹ 50

VERGHESE KURIEN

WHAT DOES IT TAKE FOR A MILK-DEFICIENT COUNTRY TO BECOME THE WORLD'S LARGEST MILK PRODUCER? NOTHING SHORT OF A REVOLUTION. AND REVOLUTIONS DO NOT ALWAYS START WITH A BANG. SOME ARE BORN QUIETLY, OFTEN IN THE UNLIKELIEST OF PLACES, SPEARHEADED BY THE UNLIKELIEST OF PEOPLE.

INDIA'S MILK REVOLUTION BEGAN IN A SMALL, DUSTY TOWN OF GUJARAT, SPARKED OFF BY A MAN WHO HAD ABSOLUTELY NO INTEREST IN DAIRYING AND HAD, IN FACT, LANDED THERE BY A SIMPLE TWIST OF FATE. HE ENDED UP DEDICATING HIS BEST YEARS TO THE CAUSE OF GUJARAT'S POOR MILK FARMERS AND SPENDING HIS WHOLE LIFE ENSURING THAT OUR LAND FLOWED WITH MILK, IF NOT HONEY. THIS IS THE STORY OF VERGHESE KURIEN – THE MAN WITH THE 'BILLION-LITRE' IDEA – THE CREATOR OF AMUL.

OUR STORY, THOUGH, BEGINS FAR AWAY FROM GUJARAT. ON NOVEMBER 26, 1921, VERGHESE KURIEN WAS BORN TO A WEALTHY SYRIAN CHRISTIAN FAMILY IN KOZHIKODE, KERALA.

BLESSED WITH A REMARKABLE MEMORY, KURIEN EXCELLED IN ACADEMICS AS WELL AS IN SPORTS…

WELL DONE, KURIEN!

…AND JOINED COLLEGE AT FOURTEEN.

WILL I MAKE FRIENDS? ALL THESE BOYS ARE SO MUCH OLDER TO ME!

AFTER A DEGREE IN ENGINEERING, KURIEN STARTED AN APPRENTICESHIP WITH THE TATA IRON AND STEEL COMPANY (TISCO). HIS UNCLE, JOHN MATHAI, WAS THE DIRECTOR THERE. ONE DAY –

IT'S THE DIRECTOR! WHAT IS HE DOING IN OUR HOSTEL?

HE'S COME TO VISIT HIS NEPHEW, THE NEW CHAP – KURIEN.

OH, SO THAT'S HOW HE GOT THE JOB!

FROM THAT DAY ONWARDS –

SHUSH… HERE HE COMES!

HEY KURIEN, WHY DON'T YOU SIT WITH US?

THEY'RE ALL SO CAREFUL AROUND ME. I CAN'T STAY IN A PLACE WHERE MY COLLEAGUES DON'T THINK I'M WORTHY OF MY JOB. I MUST LEAVE AT ONCE.

UNCLE, I DON'T WANT TO STAY IN TISCO ANYMORE. I'M NO LONGER KURIEN HERE, I'M THE 'BOSS'S NEPHEW'.

THAT IS FINE, BUT THE MANAGERS TELL ME THAT YOU'RE THE BEST APPRENTICE HERE. YOU CAN EASILY RISE TO THE TOP!

I'VE ALREADY APPLIED FOR A GOVERNMENT SCHOLARSHIP TO GO ABROAD AND STUDY METALLURGY AND NUCLEAR PHYSICS.

YOU'RE DIGGING YOUR OWN GRAVE, YOUNG MAN.

KURIEN WENT WITH GREAT HOPES FOR THE SCHOLARSHIP INTERVIEW. BUT –

HUH?

WHAT IS PASTEURISATION?

KURIEN BRAVELY VENTURED A GUESS.

ER… I'M NOT SURE OF THE PROCESS, SIR. BUT I THINK IT MAY BE SOMETHING TO DO WITH STERILISING MILK?

THAT'S RIGHT. CONGRATULATIONS, YOU HAVE BEEN SELECTED FOR A SCHOLARSHIP TO STUDY DAIRY ENGINEERING.

WHAT? NO, NO… THERE MUST BE SOME MISTAKE! I WANT TO STUDY METALLURGY AND NUCLEAR PHYSICS.

IF YOU WANT TO STUDY ABROAD, THIS IS WHAT'S AVAILABLE. MAKE UP YOUR MIND.

KURIEN WAS IN A DILEMMA.

IF I DON'T TAKE THIS SCHOLARSHIP, THEN I'M STUCK WORKING HERE. I'M BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA!

DESPERATE TO GET AWAY, KURIEN WENT TO THE U.S. TO STUDY DAIRY ENGINEERING AT MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY.

I'M VERGHESE KURIEN.

PLEASED TO MEET YOU. I'M MANSOOR.

THE EASY-MANNERED KURIEN SOON MADE A LARGE CIRCLE OF FRIENDS WITH HIS SPARKLING WIT AND BUOYANT HUMOUR.

LUCKILY FOR HIM, HE FOUND THAT HE COULD MAJOR IN NUCLEAR PHYSICS AND METALLURGY AFTER ALL.

I SHOULD TAKE A FEW TOKEN COURSES IN DAIRY ENGINEERING AS WELL, JUST TO KEEP THE GOVERNMENT HAPPY.

THE YEARS PASSED IN A WINK AND SOON IT WAS TIME TO RETURN HOME.

KEEP IN TOUCH, DALAYA. TAKE CARE, MEDORA!

SINCE KURIEN HAD GONE ABROAD ON A GOVERNMENT SCHOLARSHIP, HE HAD TO GET IN TOUCH WITH THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION IN DELHI.

AH, SO YOU'RE KURIEN. WE ALREADY HAVE A JOB WAITING FOR YOU IN ANAND.

ANAND? UH... WHERE IS THAT EXACTLY?

IN GUJARAT.

I'M SORRY, SIR, BUT THE DEAN OF ENGINEERING AT MICHIGAN HAS GOT ME A JOB IN CALCUTTA*.

WHAT?! THE GOVERNMENT HAS PAID FOR YOUR STUDIES ABROAD. YOU HAVE TO ACCEPT THE JOB YOU'RE GIVEN, OR ELSE WE CAN SUE YOU!

THE DISAPPOINTED KURIEN HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO PACK HIS BAGS.

I HAD DREAMT OF AN EXCITING, CHALLENGING JOB IN A BIG, FAST-PACED CITY, AND HERE I AM, OFF TO A PLACE THAT'S BARELY VISIBLE ON A MAP!

*NOW KOLKATA

UNKNOWN TO KURIEN, A FLEDGLING MILK COOPERATIVE SOCIETY WAS STRUGGLING TO TAKE FLIGHT IN THE KAIRA DISTRICT, WHERE ANAND WAS. ITS STORY HAD STARTED IN BOMBAY*.

Anand

Bombay

IN 1942, A NUMBER OF BRITISH OFFICERS STATIONED IN BOMBAY HAD FALLEN SERIOUSLY ILL. AN INVESTIGATION HAD REVEALED THAT IT HAD BEEN BECAUSE OF THE MILK.

THE REPORT SAYS THAT EVEN THE SEWAGE WATER IN LONDON IS LESS POLLUTED!

THE GOVERNMENT HAD SET UP A DEPARTMENT AND APPOINTED A MILK COMMISSIONER. MILK WAS TO BE TRANSPORTED FROM THE NEARBY DISTRICT OF KAIRA.

THE MILK FARMERS OF KAIRA HAD BEEN IN THE CLUTCHES OF A MAN CALLED PESTONJI EDULJI DALAL WHO HAD TAKEN ON THE NAME POLSON. HE WOULD BUY THE MILK AT LOW PRICES AND SELL IT FOR DOUBLE THE AMOUNT.

THIS DOESN'T HAVE ENOUGH FAT. I CAN'T GIVE YOU MORE THAN AN ANNA^.

THAT IS TOO LITTLE!

POLSON HAD AGREED TO SUPPLY MILK TO BOMBAY ON A FEW CONDITIONS.

THE GOVERNMENT MUST FINANCE ALL THE MACHINERY, PAY ME A PROCESSING FEE AND MAKE ME THE SOLE SUPPLIER.

THE ARRANGEMENT SUITED EVERYONE, EXCEPT FOR THE POOR FARMERS. WHILE THE ACTUAL PRICE OF MILK WAS RS 2 PER LITRE, THE FARMERS WOULD GET 2 ANNAS!

TRIBHUVANDAS PATEL, A LOCAL POLITICAL LEADER, HAD MET WITH SARDAR VALLABHBHAI PATEL WITH THE FARMERS' PROBLEMS.

I SEE ONLY ONE WAY OUT OF THIS. GET TOGETHER AND FORM A COOPERATIVE SOCIETY. CUT THE MIDDLEMAN OUT.

WE ARE READY, AS LONG AS WE HAVE YOUR SUPPORT, SARDAR.

I WILL SEND MORARJIBHAI** TO GUIDE YOU.

*NOW MUMBAI

^16 ANNA = 1 RUPEE

**MORARJI DESAI, WHO WENT ON TO BECOME THE 4TH PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

IN A MEETING ATTENDED BY HUNDREDS OF IMPASSIONED VILLAGERS –

EACH VILLAGE IN THE KAIRA DISTRICT WILL HAVE A COOPERATIVE SOCIETY, WITH THE DISTRICT UNION AT ANAND. BOMBAY MUST BUY MILK FROM US DIRECTLY.

IF THEY REFUSE, WE WILL POUR AWAY OUR MILK!

AND SO, DURING A TWO-WEEK MILK STRIKE IN KAIRA, THE FARMERS HAD POURED AWAY THEIR MILK BUT NOT A SINGLE DROP HAD BEEN GIVEN TO POLSON. POLSON'S BUSINESS, AS WELL AS THE BOMBAY MILK SCHEME, HAD COLLAPSED.

THAT WAS WHEN DARA KHURODY, A DAIRYMAN, HAD VISITED ANAND WITH THE MILK COMMISSIONER TO FIND OUT WHAT HAD BEEN GOING ON.

YOU HAVE TO STOP THIS NONSENSE RIGHT NOW.

YOU KNOW THE GOVERNMENT CAN TAKE ACTION AGAINST YOU FOR THIS.

TRIBHUVANDAS HAD ONLY ONE ANSWER.

HEY!

SEEING THAT THE FARMERS WOULD NOT BUDGE –

SIR, LET THEM FORM THE COOPERATIVE. IT'S NOT GOING TO LAST. HOW CAN THESE ILLITERATE VILLAGERS RUN A BUSINESS?

FINE, LET THEM FORM THEIR DASHED COOPERATIVE!

AN OVERJOYED TRIBHUVANDAS HAD STARTED TRAVELLING FROM VILLAGE TO VILLAGE, URGING FARMERS TO FORM COOPERATIVES.

ALONE, YOU ARE POWERLESS AGAINST THE CRAFTY MIDDLEMEN. TOGETHER, YOU CAN CRUSH THEM AND SEIZE THE PROFITS OF YOUR LABOUR.

CAN A HARIJAN LIKE ME BECOME A MEMBER OF THE COOPERATIVE?

WHY, OF COURSE! YOUR MILK AND SETHJI'S MILK WILL GO IN THE SAME CONTAINER. MILK KNOWS NO CASTE, NO RELIGION, NO BOUNDARY.

THE END OF THE YEAR 1946 SAW FIVE COOPERATIVES EMERGE FROM THE KAIRA DISTRICT. THE KAIRA DISTRICT COOPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS' UNION LIMITED (K.D.C.M.P.U.L.) WAS REGISTERED.

1947 WAS THE YEAR INDIA AROSE TO FREEDOM – BRUISED, EXHAUSTED, BUT HOPEFUL. THE NEW GOVERNMENT GAVE THE FARMERS OF KAIRA PART OF AN OLD, RUN-DOWN DAIRY THAT HAD BEEN IN ANAND SINCE 1914.

THE DAIRY WAS IN A TERRIBLE CONDITION, A FIRST WORLD WAR RELIC WITH ANCIENT MACHINERY.

MORARJI DESAI HAD CHOSEN A CHAIRMAN.

TRIBHUVANDAS, YOU'RE THE ONLY MAN HERE WHO DOESN'T WANT TO BE CHAIRMAN, WHICH MAKES YOU THE BEST PERSON FOR THE JOB!

BUT RUNNING A DAIRY MEANT OPERATING MACHINERY.

I DON'T THINK THIS IS THE WAY THE MACHINE WORKS.

WHO WILL HELP US?

THE SOLUTION TO THE FARMERS' PROBLEMS CAME ON WHAT IS CONSIDERED TO BE AN UNLUCKY DAY WORLD OVER, FRIDAY THE 13TH. BUT FOR THE FARMERS OF GUJARAT, IT WAS A DAY THAT WOULD CHANGE THE WINDS OF THEIR FORTUNE. THAT WAS THE DAY VERGHESE KURIEN ARRIVED IN ANAND.

WHEN THE STEAM TRAIN CHUGGED INTO THE TINY, DILAPIDATED STATION OF THE SMALL TOWN ON MAY 13, 1949 –

GOOD HEAVENS.. COUGH..THIS PLACE LOOKS AWFUL! I MUST APPLY FOR A TRANSFER IMMEDIATELY.

THERE WERE OTHER PROBLEMS TOO.

SORRY, WE CANNOT OFFER NON-VEGETARIANS ACCOMMODATION.

A CHRISTIAN BACHELOR? NO NO, SORRY.

KURIEN HAD TO SETTLE FOR THE GARAGE OF THE DAIRY HE HAD COME TO WORK IN.

FROM THE APARTMENTS OF MICHIGAN TO THIS!

HE COVERED UP THE HUGE HOLE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM...

...AND MADE WINDOWS IN THE WALLS.

NOW ALL I HAVE TO DO IS BUILD A BATHROOM!

AFTER A LITTLE WORK WITH THREE CORRUGATED IRON SHEETS –

AHA! THAT TAKES CARE OF THE BATHROOM SITUATION.

KURIEN'S ELDER BROTHER SENT HIM A TRAINED COOK-CUM-BUTLER OUT OF SYMPATHY FOR HIS SITUATION.

WHAT'S FOR DINNER TODAY, ANTHONY?

ROAST CHICKEN, SIR.

IT MADE FOR A FUNNY PICTURE – THE COOK IN THE SPOTLESS WHITE UNIFORM, SERVING KURIEN AT A SHAKY THOUGH BEAUTIFULLY SET TABLE IN A CORNER OF THE OLD GARAGE!

THE GOVERNMENT JOB BORED KURIEN TO TEARS.

HOW CAN PEOPLE BE SO INEFFICIENT? ALL THEY DO IS SIT AROUND SWATTING FLIES, WAITING FOR THEIR MONTHLY SALARIES TO COME.

EVERY MONTH, WITHOUT FAIL, KURIEN WOULD WRITE TO THE GOVERNMENT.

PLEASE ACCEPT MY RESIGNATION

MEANWHILE, THE COOPERATIVE WAS CONTINUING TO FUNCTION BADLY.

NOT AGAIN! THIS IS THE THIRD TIME THE MACHINE HAS BROKEN DOWN THIS WEEK.

TRIBHUVANBHAI, A NEW ENGINEER FELLOW HAS COME TO WORK AT THE GOVERNMENT CREAMERY NEXT DOOR. HE'S A 'FOREIGN-RETURN', THEY SAY. MAYBE HE CAN HELP US.

HMM... LET ME SPEAK WITH HIM.

AND SO –

HOW CAN I HELP YOU?

I AM TRIBHUVANDAS PATEL. I'M THE LEADER OF A SMALL COOPERATIVE SOCIETY THAT THE MILK FARMERS RUN HERE. OUR DAIRY MACHINERY KEEPS BREAKING DOWN. COULD YOU HELP FIX IT?

SURE. LET ME TAKE A LOOK.

KURIEN WAS THRILLED AT THE PROSPECT OF DOING SOME ACTUAL WORK! ALSO, HE WAS INTERESTED IN THE CONCEPT OF A COOPERATIVE.

HOWEVER, HIS ENTHUSIASM SOON TURNED TO FRUSTRATION.

THIS IS THE THIRD TIME I'M FIXING IT!

WILL IT WORK NOW?

FOR A FEW DAYS, YES. BUT AFTER THAT....

KURIEN RETURNED AGAIN...

...AND AGAIN...

...UNTIL –

DASH IT! I CAN'T GET THIS TO WORK ANYMORE.

YOU NEED TO GET A NEW MACHINE. TRIBHUVANDASJI, YOU NEED A PLATE PASTEURISER.

B.. BUT... HOW MUCH WILL THAT COST?

I DON'T KNOW, MAYBE UP TO 60,000 RUPEES.

HOW CAN WE AFFORD SUCH AN EXPENSIVE MACHINE?

BUT KURIEN SOMEHOW MANAGED TO CONVINCE TRIBHUVANDAS TO RAISE THE MONEY AND BUY THE PASTEURISER.

JUST AS THE MACHINE WAS ABOUT TO ARRIVE –

MY RELIEVING LETTER... IT'S HERE! FINALLY, I CAN LEAVE THIS PLACE!

HAVE YOU ALREADY GOT A JOB IN BOMBAY?

NO, NOT YET. I'LL HAVE TO GO AND LOOK FOR ONE.

THE FARMERS DON'T KNOW HOW TO OPERATE THE NEW MACHINERY. THEY NEED YOU, KURIEN. STAY FOR TWO MONTHS. WE'LL EVEN PAY YOU A SALARY.

I CAN'T BRING MYSELF TO REFUSE THIS MAN. IN ANY CASE, WHAT'S TWO MORE MONTHS?

KURIEN DID NOT KNOW THAT THE DECISION HE TOOK IN THAT MOMENT WOULD CHANGE HIS LIFE FOR EVER.

HE STARTED INVOLVING HIMSELF MORE AND MORE IN THE WORKING OF THE DAIRY.

UNTIL –

I DON'T THINK I WANT TO GET AWAY FROM THIS PLACE ANYMORE. THE SATISFACTION OF WORKING FOR A GREATER GOOD... I DON'T THINK I CAN FIND THAT ANYWHERE ELSE.

IN 1951, KURIEN BECAME THE GENERAL MANAGER OF K.D.C.M.P.U.L.

FREE FROM THE SHACKLES OF BRITISH RULE, INDIA WAS FINDING ITS FEET AND GETTING USED TO BEING AN INDEPENDENT NATION. THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT, THEREFORE, PROVED VITAL TO ITS SENSE OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY. KURIEN AND THE FARMERS COULD NOT HELP BUT GET SWEPT UP BY THE PATRIOTIC FERVOUR THAT WAS ALL AROUND.

BY 1952, MILK COLLECTION HAD GROWN FROM 200 LITRES IN A DAY TO 20,000 LITRES! MILK WAS NOW TRANSPORTED FROM KAIRA TO BOMBAY IN INSULATED VANS.

THE COOPERATIVE IS GROWING BY LEAPS AND BOUNDS! WE WILL SOON NEED A NEW DAIRY.

AND I NEED TO LEARN MORE ABOUT DAIRYING IF I'M TO MANAGE THIS PLACE PROPERLY.

FOLLOWING KURIEN'S REQUEST, THE GOVERNMENT SENT HIM TO NEW ZEALAND FOR FIVE MONTHS FOR TRAINING IN DAIRY ENGINEERING.

KURIEN WAS BURSTING WITH PLANS WHEN HE GOT BACK FROM HIS TRAINING, BUT BEFORE HE COULD START WORK, THERE WAS A LETTER FROM HIS BROTHER.

Amma is frantic with worry. She thinks you'll never marry and settle down. Anyway, I'm writing to tell you that I have met someone on your behalf, and I think you should come down as soon as possible, so we can take things forward.

IN KERALA –

YOU KNOW, I DON'T REALLY THINK MUCH OF THIS ARRANGED MARRIAGE CONCEPT.

OUR FAMILIES HAVE KNOWN EACH OTHER FOR YEARS!

BUT I'VE NEVER MET HER! BESIDES, WHO'D LIKE TO LIVE WITH ME IN A PLACE LIKE ANAND!

OH, JUST TALK TO HER ONCE.

KURIEN WAS INTRODUCED TO MOLLY. THE COUPLE WAS LEFT 'ALONE' TO TALK AND GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER.

AFTER SOME TIME –

WELL?

I'M NOT GOING TO ANAND TILL I'M MARRIED TO HER.

KURIEN AND MOLLY WENT BACK TO ANAND THE DAY THEY WERE WED.

ER... SO THIS IS ANAND. WHY DON'T YOU WAIT HERE? I'LL GET SOMEONE TO HELP US.

NO.. DON'T! I MEAN... DON'T LEAVE ME ALONE HERE.

ALL RIGHT. THE HOUSE IS JUST ACROSS THE ROAD ANYWAY.

MOLLY FOUND A FRIEND IN MANIBEN, SARDAR PATEL'S DAUGHTER. MANIBEN WAS FOND OF KURIEN, AND GREATLY INTERESTED IN THE WORKINGS OF THE COOPERATIVE.

MOLLY, YOU MUST REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE ONLY HIS SECOND WIFE. HE WAS ALREADY MARRIED TO THE DAIRY WHEN YOU WALKED INTO HIS LIFE!

HA HA! YOU ARE QUITE RIGHT.

DURING THAT PERIOD, ANOTHER PERSON, H.M. DALAYA, JOINED THE DAIRY REVOLUTION IN KAIRA.

TRIBHUVANDASJI, MEET MY FRIEND AND CLASSMATE FROM THE STATES, DALAYA. HE IS A DAIRY EXPERT. HE WILL BE A GREAT ASSET TO US.

IT IS GOOD OF YOU TO JOIN US.

TOGETHER, KURIEN AND DALAYA ACHIEVED THE IMPOSSIBLE.

WE'VE CONVERTED BUFFALO MILK TO POWDER, KURIEN! I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE THE LOOK ON KHURODY'S FACE. HE WAS SO SURE WE'D FAIL!

ALL THE CREDIT GOES TO YOU, DALAYA. THEN AGAIN, YOU ARE A YADAVA. YOU BELONG TO KRISHNA'S CLAN. MILK FARMING IS IN YOUR BLOOD!

HA HA, TRUE!

THE ACHIEVEMENT WAS A BIG LANDMARK IN INDIA'S DAIRY HISTORY, BECAUSE UNLIKE WESTERN NATIONS, MOST OF THE MILK IN INDIA CAME FROM BUFFALOES, NOT COWS. TILL THAT TIME, DAIRY EXPERTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD HAD INSISTED THAT POWDER COULD NOT BE MADE FROM BUFFALO MILK!

WITH UNICEF'S HELP, KAIRA UNION WAS ALL SET TO BUILD A NEW DAIRY IN ANAND. DR RAJENDRA PRASAD, THE THEN-PRESIDENT OF INDIA, WAS CALLED TO PLACE THE FOUNDATION STONE OF THE PLANT.

A MOUSE! THAT IS AN EXCELLENT SIGN. THE MOUSE IS THE VEHICLE OF LORD GANESHA, THE REMOVER OF OBSTACLES.

THE PLANT WAS BUILT IN A YEAR. THE THEN-PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA, JAWAHARLAL NEHRU, CAME TO INAUGURATE IT, ALONG WITH HIS DAUGHTER, INDIRA.

HMM I THINK THE SHADE IS CORRECT, BUT THE P.M. LIKES HIS ROSES TO BE SLIGHTLY SMALLER.

MOLLY MADE SURE THE ARRANGEMENTS WERE PERFECT.

AT THE END OF THE FUNCTION –

SIR, THIS IS THE ONLY POWDER PLANT IN THE WORLD THAT MAKES POWDER FROM BUFFALO MILK, AND IF WE HAVE ANYONE TO THANK FOR THIS EXTRAORDINARY FEAT, IT IS KURIEN.

MORARJIBHAI IS RIGHT. OUR COUNTRY IS FORTUNATE TO HAVE PEOPLE LIKE YOU.

THAT WAS A MOMENT THAT WOULD STAY WITH KURIEN FOREVER.

THE DAIRY BEGAN TO GROW. ONE DAY –

I... I WASN'T DRINKING THE MILK, SAHIB. I WASN'T.

KURIEN SAID NOTHING AND WALKED AWAY.

NEXT DAY –

FROM TODAY ONWARDS, I WANT EVERY WORKER TO BE GIVEN HALF A LITRE OF MILK. IT IS SHAMEFUL THAT THEY DON'T RECEIVE A SHARE OF THE VERY COMMODITY THAT THEY'RE HANDLING.

ONE EVENING, WHEN KURIEN WAS VISITING HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW, K.M. PHILIP, WHO HAD A TEA AND COFFEE COMPANY –

KURIEN, WHY HAVEN'T YOU THOUGHT OF A BRAND NAME YET? HOW COME YOU HAVE LEFT OUT SUCH AN IMPORTANT ASPECT AS MARKETING AND ADVERTISING?

HMM... YOU ARE RIGHT. I HADN'T GIVEN MUCH THOUGHT TO THAT.

A MEETING WAS HELD. MANY NAMES WERE SUGGESTED.

LET'S AVOID WESTERN NAMES. WE NEED SOMETHING THAT TELLS THE PEOPLE THAT OUR PRODUCT IS TRULY INDIAN.

BUT WESTERN SELLS! LOOK AT POLSON.

OH FORGET POLSON! WE'RE GOING TO PUT HIM OUT OF BUSINESS, REMEMBER?

HMM... HOW ABOUT THIS NAME – 'AMULYA'. ONE OF OUR CHEMISTS HAS SUGGESTED IT.

IT MEANS PRICELESS. I THINK IT'S EXACTLY WHAT WE'RE LOOKING TO CONVEY.

'AMULYA'... I DO LIKE THE SOUND OF IT.

AMULYA WAS SHORTENED TO THE CATCHIER 'AMUL' WHICH WAS THE PERFECT ACRONYM FOR ANAND MILK UNION LIMITED.

IN 1957, THE BRAND 'AMUL' WAS REGISTERED. THE YEAR WAS SPECIAL TO KURIEN AND MOLLY FOR ANOTHER REASON TOO. IT WAS WHEN THEIR DAUGHTER, NIRMALA, WAS BORN.

HA HA, SHE'S FEISTY, JUST LIKE YOU!

AMUL CONTRIBUTED TO THE COUNTRY'S WELFARE IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE. DURING THE INDO-CHINA WAR IN 1962, KURIEN WAS CALLED TO A MEETING WITH SENIOR OFFICERS FROM THE ARMY.

OUR SOLDIERS NEED MILK. CAN AMUL PROVIDE US WITH THE REQUIRED AMOUNT?

WE NEED 2,750 TONNES.

WE WILL ORGANISE WHAT YOU NEED.

WE CAN HELP YOU WITH A LOAN OR GRANT FROM THE GOVERNMENT.

NO, SIR. THE KAIRA COOPERATIVE WILL NEVER USE A NATIONAL EMERGENCY TO MAKE EXTRA BUCKS.

KURIEN FULFILLED HIS PROMISE TO THE ARMY, SACRIFICING THE CIVILIAN MARKET FOR AT LEAST HALF A YEAR.

IN THE MID 1960S, KURIEN CONTACTED AN ADVERTISING AGENCY CALLED A.S.P.*, WHOSE HEAD WAS SYLVESTER DACUNHA. THEY WERE TO MAKE A STRONG CAMPAIGN TO PROMOTE AMUL BUTTER.

THIS IS A CHALLENGE. HOW WILL A BUTTER PRODUCED BY VILLAGERS SELL WHEN THERE ARE SO MANY WESTERN BRANDS AVAILABLE?

I THINK THE TAGLINE SHOULD BE 'UTTERLY AMUL'! THE OLD ONE, 'PURELY THE BEST', IS TOO TAME.

IT WAS NISHA DACUNHA, SYLVESTER'S WIFE, WHO INSPIRED THE ICONIC TAGLINE.

DR KURIEN, WE HAVE A TAGLINE FOR YOU. 'UTTERLY BUTTERLY AMUL!' WHAT DO YOU THINK?

BUTTERLY? WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN? IT'S UNGRAMMATICAL!

HA HA, IT'S UTTERLY MADI BUT I TRUST YOU, MR DACUNHA. IF YOU THINK IT WORKS, YOU HAVE MY COMPLETE APPROVAL.

THE LINE WAS IN PLACE, NOW ALL THEY NEEDED WAS A MASCOT.

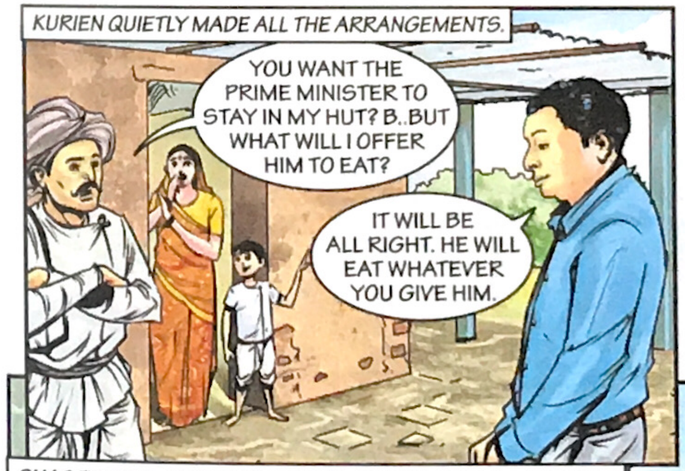
EUSTACE, THE FACE OF AMUL SHOULD BE A CHILD – AN ADORABLE, MISCHIEVOUS ONE. CAN YOU DESIGN A LOOK?

*ADVERTISING AND SALES PROMOTION

INDIAN ADVERTISING WAS IN FOR A REVOLUTION WHEN EUSTACE FERNANDES DESIGNED THE AMUL POPPET.

GRADUALLY, AMUL ROSE TO GREATER HEIGHTS. IN 1964, THE COOPERATIVE INVITED PRIME MINISTER LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI TO INAUGURATE A CATTLE FEED FACTORY IN ANAND.

KURIEN QUIETLY MADE ALL THE ARRANGEMENTS.



SHASTRI FOUND THE FARMERS MANAGING WELL WITH THE MONEY THEY EARNED FROM THE COOPERATIVES.

SHASTRI WAS AT THE COLLECTION CENTRE AT 6 A.M. THE NEXT MORNING.

*SIR

WHEN THE TOUR WAS OVER –

KURIEN, I AM PUZZLED. THE RAINFALL HERE ISN'T SO GOOD. THE SOIL TOO ISN'T THAT FERTILE. THE FARMERS ARE MODERATELY HARD-WORKING. THEN WHAT IS THE SECRET OF YOUR SUCCESS?

NO SECRET, SIR. THE FARMERS OWN THE DAIRY AND WORK FOR ITS SUCCESS.

YOU HAVE NOT JUST CHANGED THE DAIRY INDUSTRY, YOU HAVE TRANSFORMED LIVES. I WANT THE ANAND PATTERN TO BE REPLICATED EVERYWHERE IN THE COUNTRY. AND I WANT YOU TO HEAD THE OPERATIONS.

DEFINITELY, SIR. BUT I WANT THE NEW BODY TO BE BASED OUT OF ANAND, NOT DELHI. IT'S ONLY WHEN THE ORGANISATION REMAINS WITHIN THE REACH OF THE FARMERS THAT WE CAN ACHIEVE TRUE UPLIFTMENT.

IN 1965, THE NATIONAL DAIRY DEVELOPMENT BOARD WAS SET UP, WITH KURIEN AS THE FOUNDER-CHAIRMAN.

BUT WHEN KURIEN WENT TO MEET WITH THE VARIOUS STATE HEADS –

THIS STATE IS DIFFERENT. YOUR STRANGE IDEAS OF DAIRYING WILL NOT WORK HERE.

AS THE MILK COMMISSIONER I MUST KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO MY DEPARTMENT.

SURELY IT'S WHAT HAPPENS TO THE FARMERS THAT IS IMPORTANT?

A DAIRY COMPLETELY OWNED BY THE FARMERS? MY GOOD MAN, IT WILL NEVER WORK.

IT HAS WORKED IN ANAND.

WE DON'T HAVE THE RESOURCES FOR SUCH A PROJECT, KURIEN.

KURIEN WAS DISAPPOINTED BUT STILL NOT READY TO GIVE UP.

AT A MEETING WITH HIS COLLEAGUES, DALAYA AND MICHAEL HALSE –

THE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES HAVE A SURPLUS OF MILK POWDER. THEY WILL OFFER IT AS AID TO SOME DEVELOPING NATION.

SUPPOSE THEY DONATE THEIR SURPLUS TO US, WE CAN SELL IT HERE AT OUR FARMERS' PRICES...

...AND USE THE MONEY TO START MILK COOPERATIVES... THAT'S IT! LET'S DRAFT A PROPOSAL.

GOOD IDEA! BUT WE'LL NEED THE GOVERNMENT'S HELP TO FORWARD IT TO THE W.F.P.*

THE TRIO PUT A PLAN TOGETHER FOR OPERATION FLOOD, A PLAN TO CREATE AN AMUL IN EVERY STATE.

FORTUNATELY, AT THAT TIME, KURIEN HAPPENED TO MEET L.P. SINGH, THE HOME SECRETARY.

WHY AREN'T THERE MORE ANANDS IN THE COUNTRY?

BECAUSE NOBODY WANTS THEM.

DON'T WORRY. I WILL SPEAK TO THE OTHER MINISTERS ABOUT THIS.

L.P. SINGH WAS TRUE TO HIS WORD.

KURIEN HAS THE WHOLE PROPOSAL READY – A PLAN THAT CAN INCREASE MILK PRODUCTION TO AN UNIMAGINABLE EXTENT...

...AND WE'RE JUST THROWING OBSTACLES IN HIS WAY INSTEAD OF HELPING HIM PRESENT IT TO THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME.

AT THE W.F.P. MEETING, KURIEN PRESENTED A CLEAR PROPOSAL.

WFP

United Nations

World Food Programme

....AND THIS IS WHY YOU SHOULD GIVE INDIA THE FOOD AID.

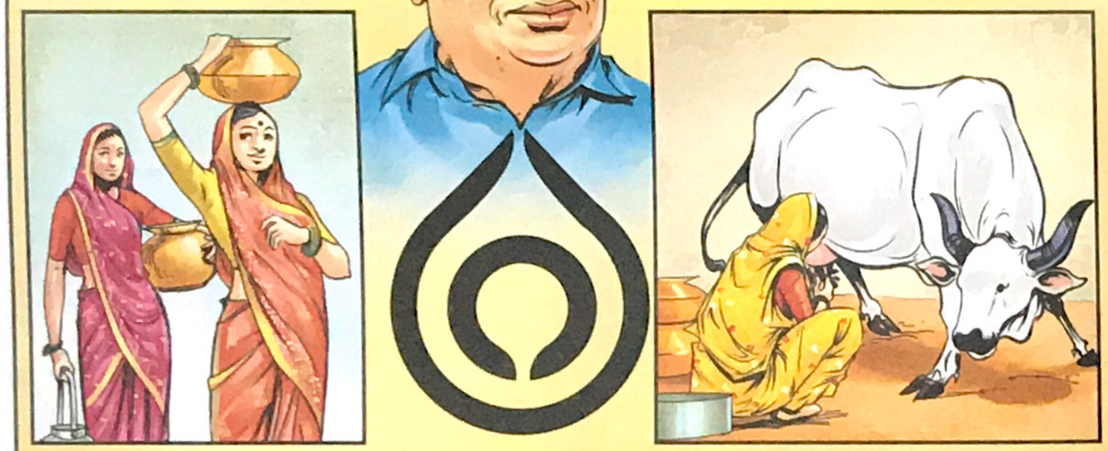
*WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME

THE W.F.P. AGREED TO KURIEN'S PROPOSAL, AND OPERATION FLOOD, THE 'BILLION-LITRE' IDEA, WAS OFFICIALLY LAUNCHED IN 1970.

MILK PRODUCTS FROM EUROPE WERE DISTRIBUTED IN INDIA, CREATING A MARKET FOR THEM IN BIG CITIES.

ONCE THE MARKET WAS CAPTURED, A DIRECT LINK WAS ESTABLISHED BETWEEN PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS THROUGH THE COOPERATIVE STRUCTURE, CUTTING THE MIDDLEMEN AND THE GREEDY MILK MERCHANTS OUT OF THE EQUATION.

MILK COLLECTION WAS DONE BY THE VILLAGERS. THEN, AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL, THE DAIRIES WERE HANDLED BY THE DISTRICT UNIONS, AND AT THE STATE LEVEL, THE MARKETING WAS MANAGED BY MARKETING FEDERATIONS.

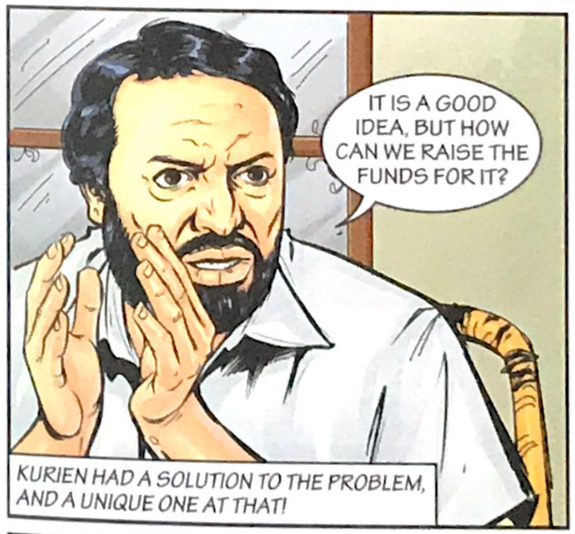


WHEN MILK PRODUCTION INCREASED, IMPORTS OF MILK AND ALL MILK PRODUCTS STOPPED.

BY LINKING MILK PRODUCERS DIRECTLY WITH CONSUMERS, REGIONAL PRICE VARIATIONS WERE REDUCED. THIS ENSURED THAT PRODUCERS GOT THEIR FULL DUE, AND CONSUMERS THE DESIRED QUALITY AND A STANDARD PRICE.

IN 1973, KURIEN SET UP THE GUJARAT COOPERATIVE MILK MARKETING FEDERATION (GCMMF), SO THAT ALL THE COOPERATIVES WOULD BE BROUGHT TOGETHER TO COMPETE WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN GREATER STRENGTH.

STRUCK BY THE IMPACT OF OPERATION FLOOD, DOCUMENTARY AND FEATURE FILM MAKER SHYAM BENEGAL APPROACHED KURIEN.



KURIEN HAD A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM, AND A UNIQUE ONE AT THAT!

THE NEXT TIME THEY MET –

AND THAT IS HOW MANTHAN WAS MADE, THE ONLY FILM IN HISTORY TO HAVE BEEN PRODUCED BY FARMERS.

KURIEN WAS AN INSTITUTION-BUILDER.

IT'S QUITE FUNNY HOW ALL THIS WAS A SIMPLE QUIRK OF FATE. I DIDN'T WANT TO COME TO ANAND, DIDN'T KNOW A THING ABOUT DAIRYING, AND NOW HERE I AM. IF OUR COUNTRY HAS TO PROGRESS, ONE CAN'T SIMPLY WAIT FOR ACCIDENTAL KURIENS TO TURN UP. WE HAVE TO ACTIVELY CREATE THEM.

HE DISCUSSED THE IDEA WITH HIS COUSIN RAVI MATHAI, WHO WAS THE DIRECTOR OF I.I.M.*, AHMEDABAD.

NONE OF YOUR STUDENTS IS INTERESTED IN SERVING THE COUNTRY. THE MOMENT THEY GRADUATE, THEY ALL FLY ABROAD IN SEARCH OF HIGH-PAYING JOBS. YOU CLEARLY DON'T MOTIVATE THEM THE RIGHT WAY.

WHY DON'T YOU DO IT THEN? COME TO I.I.M. AND SPEAK TO THE STUDENTS. IN FACT, I SUGGEST YOU JOIN THE BOARD.

IN THE HOPE OF MOTIVATING YOUNG PEOPLE TO WORK FOR THE RURAL SECTOR, KURIEN JOINED THE BOARD.
DURING THE FIRST MEETING –

....IT IS NOT WRONG TO SEEK YOUR OWN PROGRESS, BUT I FEEL STUDENTS SHOULD AT LEAST STAY FOR THREE YEARS AND SERVE THE NATION....

*INDIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT

YOU WANT THE GRADUATES OF I.I.M. TO LEARN HOW TO MILK COWS, DR KURIEN?

NO, YOU TEACH THEM HOW TO SMOKE CIGARS THEN! AND I'M RESIGNING FROM THIS BOARD.

LATER –

WELL, THAT DIDN'T WORK OUT SO WELL.

NO. THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY. I HAVE TO BUILD MY OWN INSTITUTION. WILL YOU HELP ME?

DO YOU HAVE TO ASK?

THE INSTITUTE OF RURAL MANAGEMENT, OR IRMA, WAS FOUNDED BY VERGHESE KURIEN IN 1979.

MEANWHILE, AT THE COOPERATIVE, WORK CONTINUED AS USUAL WITH PRODUCTION ONLY INCREASING. THE COOPERATIVE HAD A HUGE IMPACT NOT ONLY ON THE ECONOMY, BUT ALSO ON THE PEOPLE OF THAT AREA.

MOVE OUT OF THE WAY.

HE WAS HERE FIRST, SETHJI. YOU'LL HAVE TO GO TO THE BACK OF THE LINE.

BUT HE'S A....!

IT'S FIRST-COME-FIRST-SERVED, SETHJI. YOUR CASTE DOESN'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE. YOUR MILK AND HIS MILK WILL GO INTO THE SAME CAN. SO HOW DOES IT MATTER?

IT MADE WOMEN MORE INDEPENDENT, SINCE THEY HANDLED THE DAIRY ACTIVITY IN THEIR HOMES.

GIVE ME THE MONEY.

SO YOU CAN WASTE IT ON ALCOHOL? I EARNED THIS MONEY AND I WILL USE IT FOR OUR DAUGHTER'S SCHOOL.

IN FACT, THE WOMEN WERE TAKEN TO THE DAIRY PERIODICALLY TO SEE HOW IT OPERATED.

JUST LOOK AT ALL THE BUTTER THIS HUGE MACHINE IS CHURNING OUT!

KURIEN'S PERSONAL QUALITIES WERE AS LEGENDARY AS HIS ACHIEVEMENTS. HE WAS A STICKLER FOR PUNCTUALITY.

PLEASE CLOSE THE BOARD ROOM. THIS MEETING HAS NO PLACE FOR LATECOMERS.

UM, AS YOU SAY, SIR.

HIS INTEGRITY WAS UNSHAKEABLE.

DADA, IS IT OKAY TO LIE IF IT'S FOR A GOOD CAUSE?

NIRMALA, A LIE IS A LIE IS A LIE.

OH COME ON, DON'T TELL ME YOU'VE NEVER LIED ALL THESE YEARS.

OF COURSE I HAVE. ALL I'M SAYING IS THAT A LIE OR A HALF-TRUTH HAS A PRICE. DO YOU KNOW THE STORY OF HOW YUDHISHTHIRA'S CHARIOT CAME CRASHING DOWN?

NO...

WELL, YUDHISHTHIRA WAS THE MOST TRUTHFUL OF THE PANDAVAS. HE NEVER TOLD A LIE IN HIS ENTIRE LIFE. BECAUSE OF HIS PIETY, HIS CHARIOT NEVER TOUCHED THE GROUND. BUT DURING THE KURUKSHETRA WAR, WHEN HE SAW HOW MUCH DESTRUCTION DRONA WAS CAUSING....

THE ONLY WAY DRONA WILL LEAVE THE BATTLEFIELD IS IF WE MAKE HIM BELIEVE THAT HIS SON IS DEAD.

I HAVE A PLAN....

"AND SO –

ASHWATTHAMA IS DEAD! ASHWATTHAMA IS DEAD!

WHAT? MY SON... DEAD! NO, IT CANNOT BE.

"DRONA KNEW YUDHISHTHIRA WOULD NEVER LIE.

YUDHISHTHIRA, IS IT REALLY TRUE? IS MY SON DEAD?

"YUDHISHTHIRA CHOSE HIS WORDS CAREFULLY, HIS GUILT WRENCHING HIS HEART APART.

IT'S TRUE THAT ASHWATTHAMA'S DEAD.

"IT WAS AN ELEPHANT NAMED ASHWATTHAMA THAT HAD BEEN KILLED. DECEIVED, DRONA LEFT THE BATTLEFIELD. FROM THAT MOMENT YUDHISHTHIRA'S CHARIOT, WEIGHED DOWN BY HIS HALF-TRUTH, WHICH WAS, AFTER ALL, FOR A GOOD CAUSE, NEVER LEFT THE GROUND."

YOU SEE? YUDHISHTHIRA BELONGED TO THE GOOD SIDE, BUT ALL THE SAME, HE HAD TO PAY THE PRICE.

IT'S REMARKABLE HOW YOU SEEM TO KNOW THE MAHABHARATA AND THE BIBLE LIKE THE BACK OF YOUR HAND WHEN YOU CLAIM TO BE AN ATHEIST!

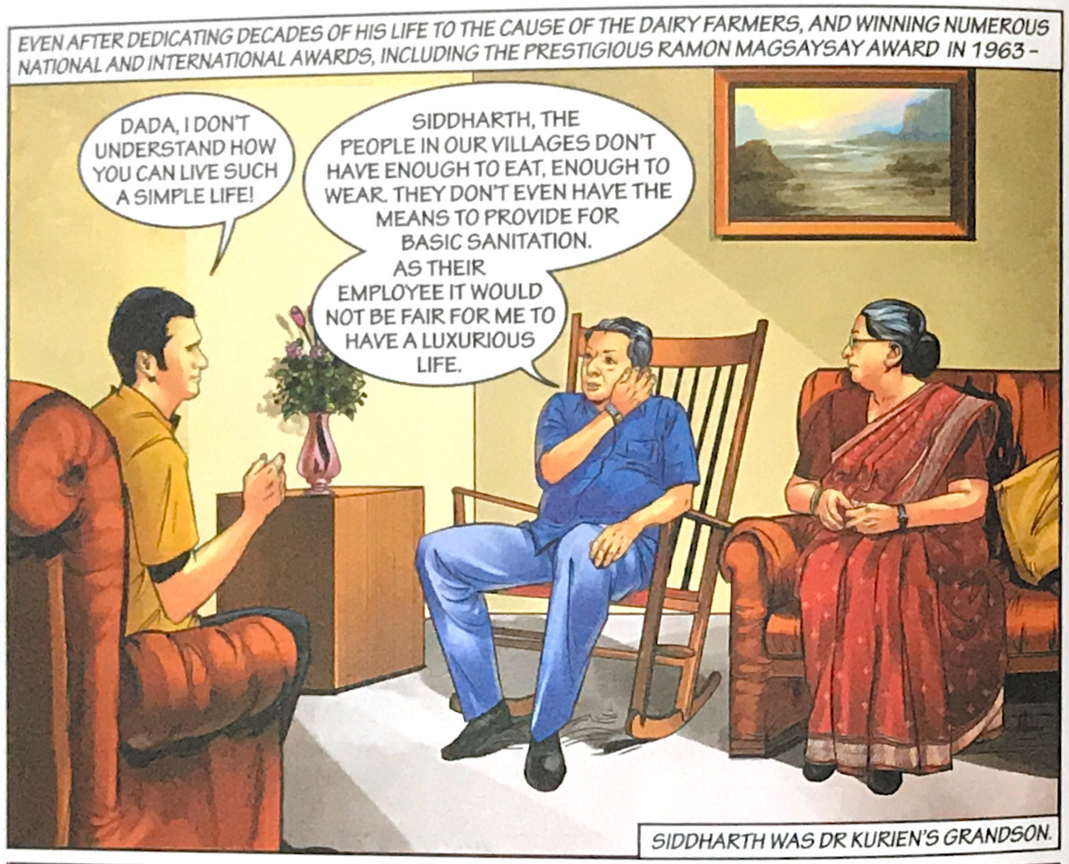
HE LOVED HIS COUNTRY WITH A MAD PASSION.

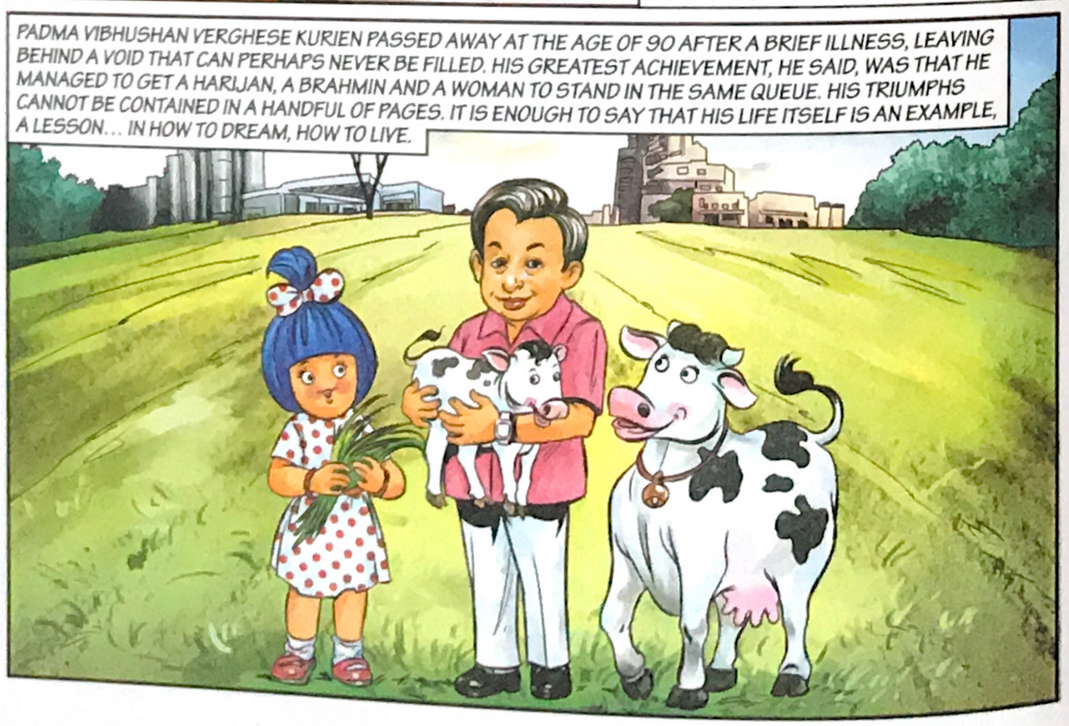
DADA, WHO DO YOU THINK WILL WIN THE MATCH?

UH, CAN'T YOU SEE THEY'RE LOSING?

INDIA, OF COURSE!

WE'LL STILL WIN.





By Nirmala Kurien

Memories of my father

I grew up with parents who were not just loving and caring but great human beings who always tried to make a positive difference in the lives of others. As a child I thought of my father as someone who worked as the General Manager of a dairy. But as I listened to him speak, and read about his work, I slowly realised what he was doing. He was in the business of developing people, and milk was only a tool.

My father believed in empowering the farmers and never doubted their ability to work hard and produce more, if there was a market. He wanted them to have the opportunity to earn more so that the divide between the rich and the poor would not grow wider but would disappear altogether. He believed that the answer was in cooperatives, not only for milk but all agricultural produce.

My father never stopped telling us what a great honour it had been, to be given the opportunity to work for the farmers of India. He felt privileged to have been trusted by them. It humbled him. He worked and lived in Anand for 63 years and died an extremely content and happy man.

A few months before he died we were together in Chennai and my son, Siddharth, asked him, "Dada, why is it that you froze your salary at Rs 5,000 per month?"
My father answered slowly and deliberately, in a feeble voice, "Do you see your Ammama (grandmother)? She has food to eat and good clothes to wear. Your mother is well educated and you, my son, have nothing to complain about as you have everything you need to succeed. But have you seen my farmers? They struggle to get one square meal. It would have been immoral on my part to take one rupee more than I required from them."
Siddharth turned to me quizzically and said, "Dada is a funny man!"

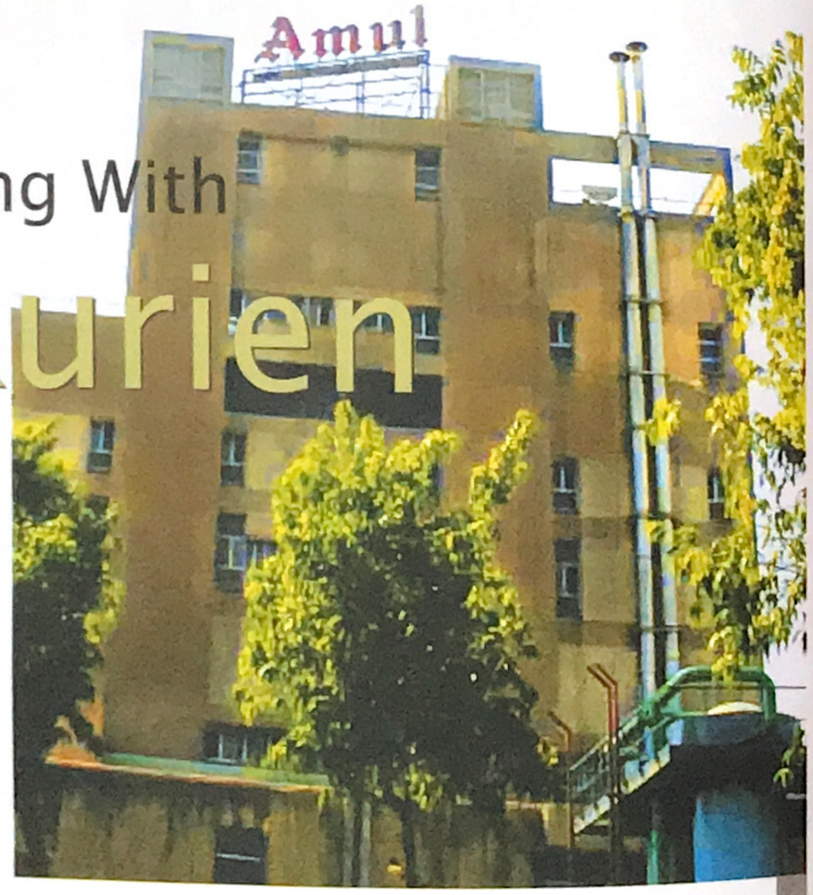
He was in the business of developing people, and milk was only a tool.

My father lived his entire life wanting to make a difference in the lives of the farmers – to help them earn an honest living and live a life of dignity. Here, I would like to quote his words, "We have traversed a path that few have dared to. We are continuing on a path that still fewer have courage to follow. We must pursue a path that even fewer can dream to pursue. Yet, we must...."

Nirmala Kurien is Dr Kurien's daughter.

By R.S.Sodhi

On Working With Dr Kurien



His passion for building strong brands has been one of the most exciting experiences for us at Amul.

I have had the pleasure and privilege of working and interacting with Dr Kurien for three decades of my professional career at Amul. His vision, dedication to the cause of cooperatives, commitment to core values like integrity and his focus on building a strong leadership team in all organisations created by him have made him a unique and inspirational leader, and institution-builder.

We will forever remember him for making India the largest producer of milk in the world.

His passion for building strong brands has been one of the most exciting experiences for us at Amul. We hope that young Indians, reading the story in this publication, are inspired by Dr Kurien's life and work.

R. S. Sodhi is the Managing Director of GCMMF Ltd, Anand.

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